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THE
BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

No. 73.]

AUGUST 31, 1814.

[Vol. 13.]

COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

The Investigator.

NO. III.

ON DETRACTION.

VARIOUS are the artifices employed by the censorious and malevolent to traduce the characters of others; they sometimes set out with innuendoes, and oblique hints, and thus by sketching the outline, leave the picture to be filled up by imagination, which never wants some of the darkest shades. Such apostrophic expressions as these keep imagination on the rack, until it forms the strongest surmises, which, of course, are always on the dark side of the picture and thus the ellipsis is supplied by the malignant venom of the serpent's tongue: this poison instantly ferments and tumefies the part thereby affected to a monstrous size; every eye is directed to the tumour, and every finger pointed at the protuberance, until at last, unless some balsamic medicine be applied, or some anodyne comfort given, the loss of character is inevitable. Suppose even that lenitives be used to prevent total extinction, yet the character suffers at least amputation, and is obliged ever after, to hop through life upon one limb. Mademoiselle Ennuëse goes in the morning to visit Madame Babillard, and upon entering, the latter informs her that her neigh-

bour Mr. Dash is considered as not too honest. That no longer ago than yesterday evening, she heard it roundly asserted by one, who had it from the authority of a person, that he heard one of his neighbours say, that he heard from a servant of Madame Fausette, "that this man referred to, did not possess a bit too much honesty." Thus the story by setting out with an oblique origin, and gathering a few particles of falsehood from every rehearsal, at last terminates in subverting the character, and consequently the temporal happiness of an innocent individual. Were the foundation, not only of this, but of a great many other stories strictly examined, the whole superstructure would fall. Where is there any ground for such an edifice? "The man is not too honest." No wonder, indeed! that is what no man ever was, nor ever can be; and thus our whole circuitous story, like a tottering fabric, ends in ruins, and may be easily resolved into Madame Babeliarde's eagerness to entertain Mademoiselle Ennuëse with good conversation. But lest the story should want its proper appendix, Mademoiselle Ennuëse on her way home calls upon Madame Tatillon, and informs her that her neighbour Mr. Dash is scarcely honest enough; to be sure, says she, this will only be *entre nous*, but Madame Babillarde has it from a person, who heard it from another person, whose friend got a whisper to that amount. Mademoiselle Ennuëse

departs, Mrs. Waddle comes hobbling in to visit Madame Tatillon, who immediately informs her of the bankruptcy of Mr. Dash's character, and at the same time asserts that it is generally reported that he is dishonest. Mrs. Waddle hurries home to inform her husband that his tenant Mr. Dash is a very great rogue, and will certainly cheat him out of the rent, unless he immediately enter on measures to prevent him; moreover, says she, you need by no means question my assertion, for Madame Tatillon has it from a person of the most profound veracity, who heard it from one to whom it was told as a secret; but a secret, to be sure that may be told, because it came through a train of people, whose veracity has never once been called in question. Thus by a series of gradually augmented falsehoods, Mr. Dash is cast into prison by his landlord, and does not get out thence until he has paid the uttermost farthing. While he is detained in prison, his wife and children are cast abandoned on the world, and subjected to the contemptuous sneer, and supercilious disdain of the censorious and malevolent. Their most elevated hopes are disappointed, their brightest prospects eclipsed, and all those little expanding buds nipped by that unkindly frost which should have descended in gentle dew and nutritious showers, to refresh their leaves and afford them health and vegetation.

Surely those persons who have been the means of reducing helpless infancy to indigence and poverty, must feel at least some remorse for such misconduct. O, certainly! people that are on other occasions possessed of such delicacy of feeling, could not remain obdurate to the cries of a wretched mother, and a group of helpless infants, who upon coming to the doors of those almsgiving

Christians will obtain as a supply for their wants, a look of pity mixed with contempt; but should they happen to come upon a day of almsgiving in that village or district, they may probably have the good success to obtain a halfpenny from some of those individuals that pique themselves on pre-eminence in tenderness and compassion; but every mite thus given is carefully registered in the bills of ostentation, and God marked debtor for the whole amount of these penurious donations. Thus "by giving to the poor," they literally seem "to lend unto the Lord," and are so fond of charitable parade, that their neighbours must either see, or be minutely informed of every item thus conferred. Such is the humanity and such the compassion of malicious detractors, evil-speakers and slanderers.

Another method practised to circulate opprobrious reports is commencing with an absolute falsehood. Thus when Mrs. Portland's daughter lately outshone all the surrounding ladies at a neighbouring ball, venom-toothed envy tried a thousand artifices to eclipse the splendour of her majestic appearance. No sooner does the news of her transcendent excellence reach the ears of Madame De l'Envié, than she consoles her own daughters by telling them, that they need by no means envy that young lady's happiness, for it is generally understood that she is supported by 'Squire Sportsman. They immediately exclaim: "O! mamma how thoughtless were we, who did not perceive that until now, for 'Squire Sportsman danced the first set with her, and was all attention to her;" surmises succeed, and whatever they are unable to know aright is filled up by sinister conjecture. Loaded with this important news, which gives them continual anxiety until it be revealed, they all

go to spend the evening with Miss Cælebs and her sisters, a delightful group of old maids. These antediluvians with all that censoriousness, which is so common to celibacy at 45, launch out into the most acrimonious invectives against Miss Portland, declaring that they had long been anxious to hear something of that nature respecting her, for they were always observing her coquetry and flirtation, and had actually seen her before she was more than 22, seizing the 'Squire's arm, and walking with him round the lawn: "now was not that a pretty piece of impudence for a girl of twenty-two!" Thus they go on, until the character of the young lady is quite lacerated, and every tongue adding venom to the wound, it becomes the grand topic of conversation. Calumny flies like lightning uninterrupted in its course, until it pervades the extensive circle of her acquaintance: no person can take an active part in the conversation of the tea-table without being well acquainted with the amour of 'Squire Sportsman and Miss Portland. Thus the young lady upon coming into company finds herself avoided by every one, as if contagious. She sits in silence; or if she attempts to speak, the eyes of the whole company are fixed upon her with looks of disrespect and contempt. She, of course, feels very unhappy in that company, and seeks pleasure elsewhere, by retiring from it as soon as convenient; her early departure is supposed to arise from a sense of shame, a consciousness of guilt, and an incapacity any longer to endure the stern looks and contemptuous frowns of her beholders: thus her guilt no longer remains a matter of doubt; but is positively affirmed and considered as true as any axiom in geometry. Should any lady attempt to vindi-

cate Miss Portland's innocence, the tongues of the whole company turn upon her, and she must either go down the stream of calumny along with them, or be taxed with being a copartner in her adventures. Should any gentleman from compassion for Miss Portland, speak favourably of her, his ears are stung with almost as great a confusion of language as prevailed at the tower of Babel, and he is obliged to sink into profound silence. Thus every person afraid to oppose the current of popularity, declines speaking in her favour. The fear of censure obliges even those who are unwilling to engage in the general torrent of detraction, so that instead of supporting a virtuous reputation, the young lady is loaded with infamy, and branded with disgrace. The old proverb is cited, "what every one says must be true," no person then entertains the least doubt of all that has been reported: the story being now so prevalent, reaches the ears of some of her relations, from whom it soon finds its way to her Mother, who being obliged to credit the report from the universality of its extent, and the implicit credit which it had obtained, turns poor Miss Portland out of doors, and leaves her to wander through the world in the most disconsolate pilgrimage, and exile. Being thus left to struggle against the tide of adversity, she beholds an enemy on every side, and contempt pictured in every face. Whither shall she go to find an asylum, or where shall she look out for a friend? The finger of reproach, and the glance of contempt tell her that she will be disappointed in all her applications, and instead of receiving the sympathetic tear, and balm of consolation, she is loaded with unmerited disgrace and reproach. How can those delicate feelings, hitherto unaccustomed to

any rebuff, endure such continual violence? How must those ruby lips formerly the seat of enchanting smiles, and source of gentle accents, now become pallid and wan! How must those cheeks, which were formerly the seat of blooming beauty be now become faded! How will those eyes that formerly sparkled with all the glances of attraction, and captivated a numerous train of admirers, now appear inexpressive and languid! How will that figure that formerly walked with unrivalled majesty and graceful dignity, now creep with timorous and tottering pace! How must perfect innocence and uncontaminated virtue, succumb beneath the frowns of an accusing world! And how must gentle delicacy shudder at the thoughts of being abandoned by every friend, and looked upon as the detestation of humanity! What relief can she find in her distress; or who will sympathize in her sufferings? The obdurate hearts of mankind are impenetrable to her cries, and compassion appears to have abandoned the earth.

L.G.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

GENTLEMEN,
HAPPENING lately to go with a friend to hear a young man of that religion termed Seceder preach, I was much pleased with the neat simplicity of the house, which though small, was well fitted up and adapted for the convenience of the congregation. Being a little too late in going, the service was some time began, which prevented me from hearing the text. The preacher when I arrived was descanting on the cunning of the serpent in betraying our first parents, which in my opinion, he

managed in a very masterly manner. Opposite to the pulpit is a pew which appears to belong to a very respectable family; on the back part of the seat, is painted in red, three boars heads. I thought it somewhat remarkable, but I supposed it might have some meaning with which I was not acquainted, and on my return home, I asked my friend who was a member of that church, if it was a mark of dishonour upon that family for disobedience to the rules of the church, or if it made any part of their clergyman's service on any particular occasion, as I had heard a man, I believed of nearly the same religion, about seventeen years ago describe the power of the great red dragon spoken of in the Revelations of St. John, and I thought that probably it meant something of a similar nature; but my friend said it meant no such thing, as either a mark of disgrace, or any part of the church service, but that it was placed there owing to family pride in the owner of the seat in exhibiting his coat of arms. As I knew nothing about the meaning of heraldry, it caused me some consideration to understand why three boars heads could become a mark of honour or respect. If the meaning was, that the ancestors of the gentleman, were great hunters and had killed three red boars, I think there can be very to little boast of on that account, as in my opinion the cultivation of three roods of corn or potatoes would have been more praiseworthy. If it meant that his ancestors had been as rude, savage, fierce, and unfeeling to their fellow-creatures, either in society or the field of battle as three red boars, it must be a shocking picture of refinement to value his ancestors for such a circumstance. For my part I would much rather want such badges of honour, or mottoes of distinction;